

From Kossuth's Twin-Soul to the Nation's Chief Nurse: The Legacy of Zsuzsanna Kossuth Meszlényi*

Nóra Deák

Abstract: In this study the personal life and professional career of Zsuzsanna Kossuth, the youngest sister of Lajos Kossuth, is discussed based on primary and secondary sources with special emphasis on her physical and emotional journey into exile, where she was surrounded by both Hungarian emigrés and American intellectuals. By the time she arrived in the United States in 1853, her personal life had been full of ups and downs: she had lost her husband and baby son within a year of each other, spent months in prison twice and had become sick, with only a cough initially, then pneumonia and finally "pulmonary affections." In spite of the many setbacks she suffered, Kossuth also stands apart for the unusual reason that she had a career: in April, 1849, during the Hungarian War of Independence, she was appointed the Chief Nurse of camp hospitals. Although she has not become as famous as Florence Nightingale, viewed as the founder of modern nursing, Zsuzsanna Kossuth organized seventy-two camp hospitals and a network of volunteer nurses five years previous to the Crimean War. The year 2017 was dedicated in Hungary to her memory commemorating the bicentenary of her birth in particular and to the profession of nursing in general. Her legacy should be promoted globally.

Keywords: *Zsuzsanna Kossuth, War of Independence in 1848-49, nursing, volunteering, military hospitals, emigration, exile*

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One hundred and seventy-one years ago, on April 16, 1849, the then Governor-President Lajos Kossuth appointed his youngest sister, Zsuzsanna, as the Chief Nurse of all military hospitals in Hungary for the rest of the War of Independence. It can only be imagined how unusual and unpopular this appointment seemed to the army generals: a lady, especially a relative of Hungary's first statesman, was put in charge of the nursing division of the military and tasked with managing its network of volunteer nurses and inspecting the proper quantity and quality of health care equipment and supplies in hospitals. Such a thing was unheard of in a male-dominated society and especially in a male-dominated profession! Already a role model for nurses in Hungary, in 2017 the Hungarian Nursing Association devoted an entire memorial year to commemorating the bicentenary of Zsuzsanna Kossuth's birth, the chief nurse of camp hospitals during the War of Independence of 1848/49, and Governor Lajos Kossuth's fourth and youngest sister. (Out of the five Kossuth siblings, Zsuzsanna was eventually the youngest to die, but not the earliest, since her eldest sister Mrs. István Breznay née Karolina Kossuth died at the age of thirty-eight in 1848.)

Born in 1817 in Sátoraljaújhely, Hungary, Zsuzsanna Kossuth died in exile in New York City as Mad[ame] Susanne Kossuth Meszlényi when she was only thirty-seven years old. This paper examines who this lady with such a well-known name was while also exploring how she came to live in New York City. I will finally discuss why her life and works should be remembered even two hundred years after her birth. (In this article the Hungarian spelling of names and locations will be used throughout, unless the quotation was taken from an original publication in English or has some special significance.)

"I have nothing to ask for from the Emigration but oblivion...." Republished verbatim in her *Memorial* booklet, this quotation can be found in a letter by Madame Meszlényi that was originally published in the *Independent* after her death according to the anonymous writer of her *Memorial* booklet (*Memorial* 1856: 64). Based on testimony from their contemporaries, the Kossuth siblings were not only physically similar but also possessed "twin-souls," as Lajos called his sister, fifteen years his junior. As her older brother, he supervised her education, polished her letter-writing skills and style and later involved her in editing a journal in Pest as a correspondent and secretary. The fifth – and late – child in the Kossuth family, Zsuzsanna was just as bright and full of energy as her beloved and idolized brother, who became a lawyer by education, a journalist by profession, a politician and statesman by talent, and a refugee by necessity. They shared looks, temperament, the same enthusiasm and passion for their motherland and the fate of exiles.



Lajos Kossuth



Zsuzsanna Kossuth

What sources are available for those wishing to learn about Zsuzsanna Kossuth's life, thoughts, actions and struggles? Although Zsuzsanna was an ardent correspondent as was customary in the mid-nineteenth century, no diary appears to have been left for posterity. Kossuth's letters to Antal Vörös, a close family friend who became Lajos Kossuth's personal secretary and archivist in 1848, were archived by Vörös and are available for researchers in the Hungarian National Archives. First pioneered in Hungary by the female co-authors, Éva Földes and Emma Szabó in 1944, then followed by Erzsébet Kertész in 1983, biographical novels relaying Zsuzsanna's life were published partly based upon these letters, which were eventually published together in 2005 with other Kossuth family letters and relevant documents, edited by Magda Rabati. Bearing the subtitle of "A romantic biography," the latest novel about Kossuth was published in late 2019 by the author and economist, Anna Berényi.

A popular writer until the 1980s, one of Zsuzsanna Kossuth's biographers, Erzsébet Kertész (1909-2005), was primarily viewed as a representative of juvenile literature, even though generations of readers enjoyed her stories. In the sixties Kertész launched a new series of biographical novels concerning women who attained prominence in history, science and literature, including—among others—the first Hungarian medical doctor, Vilma Hugonnai (publication year: 1965), the educator Blanka Teleki (1966), the author Mrs. Sándor Petőfi née Júlia Szendrey (1969), the writer Mrs. Miklós Jósika née Júlia Podmaniczky (1974), the defender of the Munkács/Mukachevo fortress, Ilona Zrínyi (1986), poet Elizabeth Barrett-Browning (1964), writer Harriet Beecher-Stowe (1967) and Florence Nightingale (1976). The last volume in the series discussed Zsuzsanna Kossuth's life story and was published in 1983. Entitled *Fiút vártak, lány született* ['Boy Expected, a Girl Delivered'], this autobiography may easily explain why Kertész had chosen independent, strong, hard-working female role models for her novels.

All women who had proved that traditional roles in society could change (Magyari 2010), this cast of "just girls" demonstrated what had previously been either unimaginable or unprecedented: that women could also achieve success in different walks of life. Kertész's literary success was due to mixing facts and details with imagination; she managed to (re)construct the life of her heroine in a way that was both authentic and entertaining, although she can be criticized for not citing her sources. None of Kertész's works has been translated into English.

Two publications do discuss Zsuzsanna Kossuth in English: one is a short biography written anonymously and published roughly two years after Zsuzsanna Kossuth Meszlényi's death in Boston, where it was sold by the bookdealer, N. C. Peabody, according to the title page. The number of copies printed at the time is unknown; several copies of the original printed edition are, however, available in libraries worldwide. The second publication consists of a chapter in a volume discussing sisters of notable historic and literary figures, in which Zsuzsanna Kossuth is included as one example. As the author of the latter acknowledges in the Preface, "in regard to the sketch of Susanne Kossuth, the facts are chiefly taken from a little work published many years ago in Boston, U.S.A." (Lee 1892). It must be added that this publication repeats the same inaccuracies, stories, and usage of German town names (such as Erlau for Eger or Grosswardein for Oradea/Nagyvárad) for locations that had belonged to Hungary at the time. We can only guess how many copies of the first, primary publication might have been available in Hungary at the time of writing the first biography in Hungarian in 1944. Only two copies of the original edition can be found in the National Széchényi Library (NSzL), while one copy of a reprinted, 2010 edition (a volume in the Papers of Lajos Koncz housed at the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) is listed in the Hungarian Shared Online Catalog. Interestingly enough, Lajos Kossuth had a copy of this original, 1856 publication in his personal library collection, which was transferred two months after his death in 1894 from Turin, Italy (where he died) to the Széchényi Library of the National Museum. It is also worth noting that both the co-authors, Földes and Szabó, as well as Erzsébet Kertész included the cover of this work—together with Lajos Kossuth's signature—as an illustration, thereby suggesting that they had been aware of Lajos Kossuth's copy and used it as reference, even though the lists of books, periodicals and small prints (one compiled by Kossuth in 1864, and the other by the chief librarian right before the transfer) that detail his library are still unpublished and housed in the Manuscript Division of NSzL. The booklet itself is part of the Historic Collection of Lajos Kossuth and is available for research. Although I was unable to discover when and how Lajos Kossuth had received his copy, as I was going through the booklet page by page, I discovered a bookmark bearing the name "Dr. Éva Földes" and the date "Jan. 19, 1944" written on it.

Mystery, however, still surrounds how an article published in the popular Hungarian weekly, *Vasárnapi Ujság* ['The Sunday Newspaper'] and entitled "Kossuth Lajos és családja" ['Louis Kossuth and His Family'], cited the *Memorial* as one of its sources for describing her achievements as early as 1880. Before examining this sixty-four-page booklet and its mysterious "anonymous" author, it must be mentioned that the sole portrait of Zsuzsanna Kossuth known to this date appeared in this article (along with those of several other family members) and was later published in Lajos Kossuth's obituary, "Kossuth Lajos meghalt" ['Louis Kossuth is Dead'] (1894: 188).

Even though no clue points to the possibility that a Hungarian translation of the *Memorial* booklet has ever been made, a comparison reveals that this source had been known and used by

Zsuzsanna Kossuth's biographers, who in turn repeated mistakes such as claiming that her year of birth was 1820 or details like she "called into existence, arranged and superintended seventy-two hospitals" (*Memorial* 1856: [3]). It seems evident that the *Memorial*'s author must have known Zsuzsanna in person given the following statement: "We wish to give our readers some notices of what we have incidentally learned from herself and friends of this remarkable passage in her life; together with a few circumstances that have fallen under our own observation, here in this country, illustrating her general characteristics" (*Memorial* 1856: 4). While the author may have been anonymous and unknown to Földes, Szabó and Kertész, both the journalist in 1880 and the librarian, historian, writer and poet, Ida Bobula (1900-1981), revealed her possible identity as that of Miss Elizabeth Palmer Peabody. Bobula made this connection in an article published in the journal *A Fáklya* ['The Torch'] (Bobula 1960), which is fortunately available in the Vasváry Collection in Szeged.

An educator, writer, publisher, bookstore owner and librarian from Boston, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody (1804-1894) was herself an educated reformer in multiple fields. According to one of her contemporaries, she was a great friend of the early Hungarian exiles and published some of Dr. Charles Kraitsir's books, whom she greatly admired (Hanaford 1876). Known as Charles Kraitsir in the United States, Károly Krajsir (1804-1860) was a Hungarian physician who had fought in the Polish Uprising in 1831 and fled with Polish refugees first to Paris, then to America in 1833. Krajsir not only changed his homeland, but his career as well: after medicine, he became a philologist and lived in Boston around 1849. He later moved to Morrisania (a historical name for the South Bronx in New York City), where he died in 1860. The owner of a bookstore and foreign library between 1840 and 1852 in Boston, Miss Peabody "belonged to the world of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Horace Mann, of Emerson and Bronson Alcott, of Margaret Fuller, Samuel Gridley Howe and Charles Sumner." Or maybe it was actually the other way round and these authors and thinkers instead belonged to Miss Peabody's circle, especially after "[t]he bookshop she opened in 1840 at 13 West Street, Boston, became a gathering ground for intellectuals and reformers. Here Transcendentalism was nourished, *The Dial* was printed, and Margaret Fuller gave readings," writes Ishaber Ross in a book review of *Three Wise Virgins* by Gladys Brooks (Ross 1957). Peabody's sisters were also artists: Sophia Amelia Peabody Hawthorne was a painter, sculptor and illustrator who married writer Nathaniel Hawthorne. Herself an author and teacher who tutored students in Italian for a time, Mary Tyler Peabody married the education reformer, Horace Mann, who was a Massachusetts Representative in the U.S. Congress. According to the researcher, Tom Angi (1991), who found documents in the Vasváry Collection to support these connections Mann "became a close friend and firm supporter of Lajos Kossuth and the Hungarian War of Independence. He and his wife Mary Peabody Mann, a sister-in-law of Nathaniel Hawthorne, befriended Emília [Kossuth] and her sons through the intervention of Mary's sister, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, a leading transcendentalist and publisher of many famous American poets and writers."



Elizabeth Palmer Peabody

The initials of the bookdealer, or publisher, "N. C." refer to Nathaniel "Nat" Cranch Peabody, one of Elizabeth's brothers who was responsible for running the "family business;" he and their father sold homeopathic remedies in the store, while the sisters ran a private school upstairs in a building that was designated a Boston Landmark in 2011. Why Peabody wanted to remain anonymous requires further research, particularly given the fact that she had other publications, such as *Crimes of the House of Austria Against Mankind*, which she edited and published in 1852 in defense of her highly respected Hungarian and Polish refugees.

By the time Zsuzsanna Kossuth arrived in New York, her personal life had been full of ups and downs: she had lost her husband and a one-year-old son within a year of each other, spent months in prison twice and become sick first with what was just a cough, then pneumonia and finally "pulmonary affections" (*Memorial* 1856: 33). When she was arrested and imprisoned for the second time due to her suspected involvement in the conspiracy led by József Makk, or Mack (1810?-1868) in December 1851, she was transported from Újépület (a prison in Pest) to the Criminalgebäude (state prison in Wien). Commissioned by the then Secretary of State Daniel Webster to serve as U.S. Chargé to the Austrian Empire between 1850 and 1852, Charles J. McCurdy succeeded in securing an emigration visa for her and the rest of the Kossuth family, totaling fourteen family members (Rabati 2005: 278-302). Exile not only meant leaving her beloved homeland, but also Europe once and for all. The large family ended up in Brussels, where they were forced to stop because both Zsuzsanna and her elderly mother, Mrs. László Kossuth, were too weak and sick to risk a long voyage overseas. A group of exiles who were already in Brussels (including writers Miklós Jósika and his wife Júlia Podmaniczky), helped the Kossuth family settle there temporarily. It was in Brussels Zsuzsanna learned how to make soap, lace and do business in order to earn a living for her ailing mother and two young daughters, aged nine and ten.

In addition to her physical illness and homesickness, Zsuzsanna also had to endure the accusations and disagreements that emerged within the exile community and targeted her brother and family. While still in Brussels, Zsuzsanna expressed her feelings and thoughts in a letter that became known as the mysterious "*Independent* letter." At the end of the *Memorial* booklet, Peabody explains that she inserted "this letter just as it was printed in the "*Independent*," although, being translated from the Hungarian by a Hungarian, it is not quite English" (*Memorial* 1856: 58). Part of the mystery, namely that of to whom the letter has been addressed, was solved by Magda Rabati (2005: 309). According to Rabati, the letter's recipient was the journalist and

long-time Kossuth family friend, Lajos Csernátony (1823-1901), who had once been Kossuth's personal secretary on the National Defense Commission and was, based on various sources, in correspondence with the Kossuth sisters.¹



Lajos Csernátony in Edinburgh, circa 1857

Between 1849 and 1867, Csernátony lived in exile in Paris, London and New York City and was, to say the least, a controversial figure. Accused of being an Austrian spy, Csernátony's dirty, attacking style in journalism also added to his notoriety. Following an invitation from Kossuth's sisters, he went "[t]o Amer[ica] from England in 1853, was working for the *New York Times* for seven months. This paper sent him to England as correspondent. Worked for the *Independent* also." This at least is what Ödön Vasváry recorded about Csernátony in his own catalog, based on József Szinnyi's literary encyclopedia of Hungarian authors (1893). The historian of Hungarian journalism, Géza Buzinkay, however, warns about the accuracy of these details (2008: 193) since the sources were self-provided by Csernátony and unverified. In the publications mentioned above, the original letter from Zsuzsanna Kossuth to Csernátony is dated September 1852, but was most likely written in May or early June according to Rabati; its whereabouts remain unknown. The other important question regards where and when the letter was published in English in the first place? Through personal contacts, I was able to turn to

¹ Letter to the Kossuth sisters. Országos Levéltár, Kossuth gyűjtemény ['Hungarian National Archives, Kossuth fond']. II. u. 5-3., cited by Csép (1958: 347).

Rutgers University's librarian, David Kuzma, who was able to locate the article in the American Antiquarian Society's database. It turns out that the letter was published twice: first in the November 9, 1854 issue of *The Independent*, then two days later in *The New York Times*. It was then republished in the *Memorial* booklet and translated back to Hungarian. Both the English and Hungarian translators remain unknown to this date. It can be surmised that Csernátony had excellent connections among New York's newspaper circles, which means that there could be some truth in his biography after all. It should be mentioned that Csernátony also participated in the earliest Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Száműzöttek Lapja* ['Hungarian Refugees' Weekly']² published in the United States in 1853, with a letter addressed to a "Mrs. M.," written from Bridgewater, England and dated October 19, 1853 (Csernátony 1853). In this article, Csernátony refers to plans he had regarding going to New York at a later date and his desire to work for the newspaper that was founded, edited and published by Károly Kornis (1822-1863). Preserved only in fragments, this letter appeared on November 10, 1853, in the fourth issue of the total six issues that this paper attained. Could the "Mrs. M." Csernátony addresses be in fact Madame Meszlényi? Although no hint refers to her in particular, her identity appears to be likely.

While members of the Kossuth family were exiled from Hungary and living in Brussels, Lajos Kossuth went on a fundraising tour to England and the United States. As was documented by Károly László in his diary, towards the end of Kossuth's visit a group of ladies invited him to give a lecture on June 21, 1852 in the Broadway Tabernacle Hall in New York, a building that had originally been a Presbyterian church and was located at 340-344 Broadway, between Worth and Catherine Lane. The title of the lecture was *The Future of Nations*; the donations (\$2,600) were used to support his mother and other family members who were expected to arrive shortly. He rented a house for them at 52 East 16th Street, where they were to open a school for girls.

² Only issues, No. 1, 2, and 4 are preserved in the Hungarian Széchényi Library; the contents of the other three issues are known from the literature. Issue no. 4 has a hole in the middle and was restored as best as possible. These comprise the only surviving copies.

New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1891 128 - 18 Jun 1853-16 Jul 1853

Image 249 of 723

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Sold by McSpedon & Baker, Stationers, 55 Pine Street, adjoining the Custom House, N. Y.

DISTRICT OF NEW YORK—PORT OF NEW YORK.

I, *J. I. Comstock* do solemnly, sincerely and truly *swear* that the following List or Manifest of Passengers, subscribed with my name, and now delivered by me to the Collector of the Customs for the District of New York, contains, to the best of my knowledge and belief, a just and true account of all the Passengers received on board the *Steamship Baltic* whereof I am Master, from *Switzerland* So help me God.

Sworn to this *28th day June 1853* Before me *J. I. Comstock*

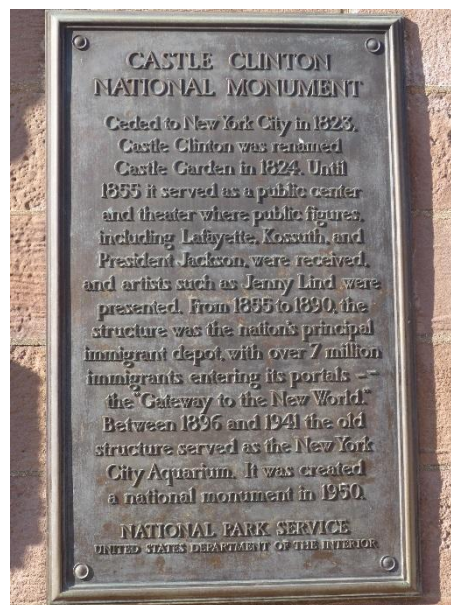
List or Manifest OF ALL THE PASSENGERS taken on board the *United States Mail Steamer Baltic* burthen *twenty seven hundred 23 3/4* tons.

NAMES.	Age.		SEX.	OCCUPATION.	The country to which they severally belong.	The country in which they intend to become inhabitants.	Died on the Voyage.
	Years.	Months.					
<i>Susan Merzeleyn</i>	<i>35</i>		<i>Female</i>		<i>Hungary</i>	<i>United States</i>	
<i>Gezele Merzeleyn</i>	<i>11</i>		<i>"</i>		<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	
<i>Helen Merzeleyn</i>	<i>10</i>		<i>"</i>		<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	
<i>Ladislav Zsulavszky</i>	<i>16</i>		<i>Male</i>		<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	
<i>Moses Dowville</i>	<i>25</i>		<i>"</i>	<i>Booth</i>	<i>France</i>	<i>"</i>	
<i>Helen Dowville</i>	<i>20</i>		<i>F.</i>		<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	

Image Index Information

Name	Event Type	Event Date	Event Place	Gender	Age	Birth Year (Estim...)	Birthplace	Ship Name
Susan Merzeleyn	Immigration	1853	New York City, New York, United States	Female	35	1818	Hungary	Baltic
Gezele Merzeleyn	Immigration	1853	New York City, New York, United States	Female	11	1842	Hungary	Baltic

As the ship manifest pictured above shows, four members of the Kossuth family boarded the mail steamer, *Baltic*, and arrived in June, 1853 at Zsuzsanna's final destination of exile, New York City. Although the spelling of the names renders them barely recognizable, their names and ages are provided as found in the ship manifest and the Passenger Search in the Ellis Island database: Susan Merzeleyn (35), Gezele Merzeleyn (11), Helen Merzeleyn (10), and Ladislav Zsulavszky (16). At the time, there was no Statue of Liberty to greet them; not even Ellis Island, the gateway to the U.S. existed then. They most likely entered through Castle Garden in the Battery (originally known as Castle Clinton), where Lajos Kossuth had earlier been so warmly "received"; a plaque commemorates this event at the entrance.



Castle Clinton National Monument (Photo by the author)

Almost a year after arriving in the United States, Mad[ame] Susanne Kossuth Meszlenyi died on June 29, 1854. Her obituary was printed in several local newspapers while a detailed account of the funeral can be read in the diary of Károly László. Published by Tivadar Ács, this diary comprises an important primary source despite its obvious misspellings: "The funeral procession started from the apartment of Mrs. Ruttkay [Lujza Kossuth] at 130 Ninth Street, where the corpse was lying in a rosewood coffin within a lead casket...went up Fifth Avenue to the church of Rev. Phillips between 11th and 12th Streets...Mr. Douglas offered his family vault to serve as a temporary resting place until her ashes could be returned to a free motherland." [*'A test Ruttkayné szállásán, IX utca 130 számú házban volt. A test volt téve egy ónkororsóba s egy rózsafa (rosewood) koporsóba...Midőn a menet az V. Avenuen-n felmenve a 11. és 12. utca között Tiszt[ele]t Philipps templomához ért...Douglas úr egy newyorki mély tiszteletben álló polgár, saját családi sírboltjának szolgálatát felajánlotta, hová a sokat szenvedett test nyugalomra tétetett, azon édes remény alatt, hogy még egykor annak pora a felszabadulandó kedves hazánk rögei alatt fog nyugodni.*] (Ács 1942: 64-65, translated from Hungarian by the author).

The cemetery, or the site of Zsuzsanna Kossuth's grave changed and was forgotten over the decades; by the time of the centennial of her death, even Ödön Vasváry thought that there was no longer a tomb to visit (Vasváry 1988). Even if it has kept some of its original street layout and buildings, Lower Manhattan has changed considerably; the houses, for example, were not numbered east and west from Fifth Avenue then (Courtney 1957: 46). Although the apartment building may be long gone³, the church is still there and was successfully identified by Professor László Csorba. Although his full research is yet to be published, his findings were briefly mentioned in a publication discussing memorials that were erected in connection with 48ers (Katona 2016: 10). As can be read on the plaque located on the church's façade, the city's first Presbyterian congregation was organized in 1716. After maintaining a house of worship for over one hundred-twenty years at Wall and Nassau Streets, the First Presbyterian Church was built in 1845 based on plans drawn by Joseph C. Wells. The main edifice is modeled after the Church of St. Saviour located in Bath, England. The tower resembles that of Magdalen College, Oxford.

Since the Kossuth family, including Zsuzsanna, was Lutheran (or *evangélikus* in Hungarian) and knew German, it is likely that she belonged to this congregation. The following quotation can be read in the church historian's article: "The funeral was on Saturday, July 1st at six in the evening. The service was in German and English. The funeral procession formed on the sidewalk in Ninth Street and marched to our church. There were deputations from French, Polish, and Italian republican societies.... Our pastor, the Reverend William Wirt Phillips, read the Scriptures and pronounced the benediction in English.... The eulogy was in German" (Courtney 1957: 46). Another plaque found next to the entrance is dedicated to the memory of Reverend Phillips (1796-1865) who served as the church's pastor for nearly forty years.

³ Based on the Assessed Valuation of Real Estate for the 15th Ward in 1853, the current location would be at the corner of Broadway and 9th Street. This information was found in the New York City Municipal Archives by Kenneth Cobb.

Unfortunately, the burial records appeared to have been lost when compatriots searched for them on the occasion of a memorial service held in 1954; the Record of Burial Vaults was recently located in the church's archives by the archivist, David Pultz. Decades later, in 1975, an official request was made to investigate whether the remains had ever been returned to Hungary. Professor August J. Molnár's correspondence regarding this request to open and examine the vault is located in the Archives of the American Hungarian Foundation in New Brunswick, NJ. The report on "An examination of the George Douglas Vault [on] June 3, 1976" was prepared by Donald G. Quick, Sexton of the church: seven of the eight coffins found in the vault were conclusively ruled out, while only circumstantial evidence indicated that the last one might be of "Suzanne Meszelyni-Kossuth" (the name is again painfully misspelled) based on the description and position of the coffin. Although no plate was found, only the size of the coffin liner raised serious doubt. Given as fifty-three inches long, this dimension indicates an adult of small stature. The vault was sealed and covered after the examination (Quick 1976). When officially asked recently by the Consulate General of Hungary in New York, Church authorities did not give permission for either a new disinterment or the removal of the remains to Hungary. Instead, a memorial plaque featuring a relief by the Hungarian sculptor, Tamás Varga, was unveiled in 2018 near the church entrance. The plaque's bilingual inscription bears the following inscription in English: "Here rests Zsuzsanna Kossuth (1817-1854) Chief Nurse of Camp Hospitals in the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848/49, Youngest Sister of Governor Lajos (Louis) Kossuth."



Memorial plaque at First Presbyterian Church, New York (Photo by the author)

Zsuzsanna Kossuth Meszlényi fought with her own means and resources for the freedom and independence of her country, an act that led to her becoming both a hero and a victim of this struggle. Her name and image have occasionally resurfaced in the course of the past two centuries and her legacy is remembered from time to time at the anniversaries of her birth or death by both Hungarian and American-Hungarian historians or journalists. In spite of this, she

never entered Hungary's collective national memory until recently, when the Hungarian Nursing Association launched a mission to commemorate her in her native country while ensuring that her gravesite was marked in New York City, a place that was never her home but remains her resting place. Her role as chief nurse of Hungary during wartime gave her a sense of duty as she grieved the deaths of her husband and infant son. While she was a smart, hard-working woman with two daughters and an elderly, ailing mother to support, she was also involved in the secret plot for a possible return of her brother from exile. Well-known by both her fellow countrymen in Hungary and in exile, even a visiting card with her image on it (Deák 2019) has survived the turbulence of history and the distance of continents. As a member of the extended Kossuth family, she was important enough to be featured in scrapbooks or even family albums, following the custom of the time.

Hailed as the founder of modern nursing, Florence Nightingale's work is commemorated in two museums: one in Istanbul and another in London. Although the founder of Hungarian nursing is often called the "Hungarian Florence Nightingale," what Zsuzsanna Kossuth did five years before the Crimean War for a nation fighting for its independence is hardly common knowledge. Just as injured soldiers from both sides of the Hungarian War of Independence in 1848-49 were grateful for her care and compassion, Hungarians from around the world should also keep her legacy alive.

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